

***Koseki* Vocabulary**

For your family history research reference, various types of vocabulary from *koseki* documents are listed below. These vocabulary lists are likely not entirely comprehensive but do include most of the Japanese terms that will be encountered in *koseki* documents.

a. Family Relation Vocabulary

As previously mentioned, the *koseki* documents cover large extended families. Consequently, there is a considerable amount of vocabulary that is used to describe the various family relationships that exist.

- 戸主 (*koshu*) – head of household
- 前戸主 (*zenkoshu*) – previous head of household
- 夫 (*otto*) – husband
- 妻 (*tsuma*) – wife (of head of household)
- 婦 (*fu*) – wife (of son or other family member)
- 父 (*chichi*) – father
- 母 (*haha*) – mother
- 祖父 (*sofu*) – grandfather
- 祖母 (*sobo*) – grandmother
- 曾祖父 (*sōsofu*) – great-grandfather
- 曾祖母 (*sōsobo*) – great-grandmother
- 兄 (*ani*) – older brother
- 弟 (*otōto*) – younger brother
- 姉 (*ane*) – older sister
- 妹 (*imōto*) – younger sister
- 長男 (*chōnan*) – 1st son
- 二男 (*jinan*) – 2nd son
- 次男 (*jinan*) – 2nd son
- 三男 (*sannan*) – 3rd son
- 四男 (*yonnan*) – 4th son
- 五男 (*gonan*) – 5th son
- 六男 (*rokunan*) – 6th son
- 七男 (*shichinan*) – 7th son
- 八男 (*hachinan*) – 8th son
- 長女 (*chōjo*) – 1st daughter
- 二女 (*jijo*) – 2nd daughter
- 次女 (*jijo*) – 2nd daughter
- 三女 (*sanjo*) – 3rd daughter
- 四女 (*yonjo*) – 4th daughter
- 五女 (*gojo*) – 5th daughter
- 六女 (*rokujo*) – 6th daughter
- 七女 (*shichijo*) – 7th daughter
- 八女 (*hachijo*) – 8th daughter
- 孫 (*mago*) – grandchild
- 曾孫 (*himago*) – great-grandchild
- 伯父 (*oji*) – older uncle
- 叔父 (*oji*) – younger uncle
- 伯母 (*oba*) – older aunt

- 叔母 (*oba*) – younger aunt
- 従兄 (*itoko*) – older male cousin
- 従弟 (*itoko*) – younger male cousin
- 従姉 (*itoko*) – older female cousin
- 従妹 (*itoko*) – younger female cousin
- 甥 (*oi*) – nephew
- 姪 (*mei*) – niece
- 養子 (*yōshi*) – adoptive son
- 養女 (*yōjo*) – adoptive daughter
- 養父 (*yōfu*) – adoptive father
- 養母 (*yōbo*) – adoptive mother
- 継父 (*keifu*) – stepfather
- 継母 (*keibo*) – stepmother
- 私生児 (*shiseiji*) – illegitimate child
- 庶子 (*shoshi*) – illegitimate child
- 子 (*ko*) – child (usually illegitimate)

b. Geography Vocabulary

Usage of geography vocabulary in *koseki* documents is somewhat limited – usually only *honsekichi* addresses and village names of individuals that enter or leave a particular family through marriage or adoption; however, this information is often key to tracing back further on maternal ancestry lines.

This list of geography vocabulary is limited to vocabulary associated with administrative divisions within Japan proper. In addition, some foreign places names associated with Japanese emigration and colonization are also included. Administrative divisions associated with locations occupied before and during World War II are not included.

- 県 (*ken*) – prefecture (rural)
- 府 (*fu*) – prefecture (urban)
- 都 (*to*) – metropolitan area
- 市 (*shi*) – city
- 区 (*ku*) – municipal ward
- 郡 (*gun*) – district
- 町 (*machi/chō*) – town (specific reading is geographically variable)
- 村 (*mura/son*) – village (specific reading is geographically variable)
- 大字 (*ōaza*) – village section
- 小字 (*koaza*) – village section
- 字 (*aza*) – village section
- 区 (*ku*) – village section
- 郷 (*gō*) (village section – some areas of Kyūshū)
- 名 (*myō*) (village section – some areas of Kyūshū)
- 免 (*men*) (village section – some areas of Kyūshū)
- 触 (*fure*) (village section – some areas of Kyūshū)
- 浦 (*ura*) (coastal village)
- 町 (*machi/chō*) – urban neighborhood (specific reading is geographically variable)
- 丁目 (*chōme*) – urban block
- 番地 (*banchi*) – lot number

- 番屋敷 (*banyashiki*) – house number
- 番戸 (*banko*) – house number
- 番邸 (*bantei*) – house number
- 米国 (*Beikoku*) – United States
- 加奈陀 (*Kanada*) – Canada
- 州 (*shū*) – state/province
- 布哇 (*Hawai*) – Hawai'i
- 朝鮮 (*Chōsen*) – Korea
- 台湾 (*Taiwan*) – Taiwan
- 樺太 (*Karafuto*) – Sakhalin
- 滿洲 (*Manshū*) – Manchuria
- 閩東 (*Kantō*) – Kwantung

c. Number Vocabulary

Numbers are used extensively in *koseki* documents – primarily for dates and secondarily in addresses. It should be noted that there are some number *kanji* used only in historical documents such as *koseki*; these are noted as such.

- 零 (*rei*) – 0
- 一 (*ichi*) – 1
- 壹 (*ichi*) – 1 (historical)
- 壹 (*ichi*) – 1 (historical)
- 弍 (*ichi*) – 1 (historical)
- 二 (*ni*) – 2
- 弍 (*ni*) – 2 (historical)
- 弍 (*ni*) – 2 (historical)
- 貳 (*ni*) – 2 (historical)
- 三 (*san*) – 3
- 參 (*san*) – 3 (historical)
- 參 (*san*) – 3 (historical)
- 四 (*yon/shi*) – 4
- 五 (*go*) – 5
- 伍 (*go*) – 5 (historical)
- 六 (*roku*) – 6
- 七 (*nana/shichi*) – 7
- 八 (*hachi*) – 8
- 九 (*kyū/ku*) – 9
- 十 (*jū*) – 10
- 拾 (*jū*) – 10 (historical)
- 二十 (*nijū*) – 20
- 廿 (*nijū*) – 20 (historical)
- 廿 (*nijū*) – 20 (historical)
- 三十 (*sanjū*) – 30
- 卅 (*sanjū*) – 30 (historical)
- 卅 (*sanjū*) – 30 (historical)
- 百 (*hyaku*) – 100
- 千 (*sen*) – 1,000

- 万 (*man*) – 10,000
- 萬 (*man*) – 10,000 (historical)

d. Time Vocabulary

There are a number of time-related vocabulary terms that are used in *koseki* documents. Month and day are used to describe individual events; time of day is sometimes used to indicate time of death.

Days of the week are not used in *koseki* documents and are not included here.

It should be noted that there are some irregular time-related *kanji* that are primarily used in historical documents such as *koseki*; these are noted as such. Historical number *kanji* identified under Number Vocabulary may also be used to indicate specific year, month, and day.

It should also be noted that Japan switched from the Chinese lunisolar calendar to the Western Gregorian calendar on January 1, 1873. This “switchover day” corresponds to the 1st day of the 1st month of the 6th year of the Meiji Era. Because of the lag of the Chinese lunisolar calendar relative to the Western Gregorian calendar, the last day of the 5th year of the Meiji Era was actually the 2nd day of the 12th month. Following the switch to the Western Gregorian calendar, the 1st month of the year (一月 *ichigatsu*) corresponds with January, the 2nd month of the year (二月 *nigatsu*) corresponds with February, etc. This correspondence did not exist under the Chinese lunisolar calendar. Strictly speaking, any dates listed on *koseki* documents prior to January 1, 1873 (the 1st day of the 1st month of the 6th year of the Meiji Era) cannot be directly translated onto the Western Gregorian calendar and should be converted. In practice, however, this conversion between the Chinese lunisolar calendar and the Western Gregorian calendar is typically only conducted in academic research where exact historical synchronization of events is required. In the context of Japanese emigration, the approximate one-month difference between the Chinese lunisolar calendar and the Western Gregorian calendar was typically ignored – for example, a birth date recorded on a *koseki* document as the 9th day of the 6th month of the 3rd year of the Meiji era was indicated in Western records as June 9, 1870 without any date conversion between the two calendars.

- 年 (*nen*) – year
- 元年 (*gannen*) – 1st year of an era
- X年 (*X + nen*) – Xth year of an era (excluding *gannen* for the 1st year)
- 月 (*gatsu*) – month
- 一月 (*ichigatsu*) – 1st month of the year
- 正月 (*shōgatsu*) – 1st month of the year (historical; “New Years month”)
- 二月 (*nigatsu*) – 2nd month of the year
- 三月 (*sangatsu*) – 3rd month of the year
- 四月 (*shigatsu*) – 4th month of the year
- 五月 (*gogatsu*) – 5th month of the year
- 六月 (*rokugatsu*) – 6th month of the year
- 七月 (*shichigatsu*) – 7th month of the year
- 八月 (*hachigatsu*) – 8th month of the year
- 九月 (*kugatsu*) – 9th month of the year
- 十月 (*jūgatsu*) – 10th month of the year

- 十一月 (*jūichigatsu*) – 11th month of the year
- 十二月 (*jūnigatsu*) – 12th month of the year
- 日 (*nichi*) – day
- 一日 (*tsuitachi*) – 1st day of the month
- 朔日 (*tsuitachi*) – 1st day of the month (historical)
- 二日 (*futsuka*) – 2nd day of the month
- 三日 (*mikka*) – 3rd day of the month
- 四日 (*yokka*) – 4th day of the month
- 五日 (*itsuka*) – 5th day of the month
- 六日 (*muika*) – 6th day of the month
- 七日 (*nanoka*) – 7th day of the month
- 八日 (*yōka*) – 8th day of the month
- 九日 (*kokonoka*) – 9th day of the month
- 十日 (*tōka*) – 10th day of the month
- 十四日 (*jūyōka*) – 14th day of the month
- 二十日 (*hatsuka*) – 20th day of the month
- 廿日 (*hatsuka*) – 20th day of the month (historical)
- 二十四日 (*nijūyokka*) – 24th day of the month
- X日 (*X + nichi*) – Xth day of the month (excluding special readings for 1st through 10th, 14th, 20th, and 24th day of the month)
- 晦日 (*misoka*) – last day of the month (historical)
- 午前 (*gozen*) – A.M.
- 午後 (*gogo*) – P.M.
- 時 (*ji*) – hour
- 分 (*fun*) – minute

e. Japanese Eras

One unique aspect of Japanese time-related terms is the use of Japanese eras (元号 *gengō*) in conjunction with Western years. In fact, Japanese era years are required to be used on official documents (including *koseki*) rather than Western years. The use of Japanese eras dates back to the year 645 and they have been used continually since the year 701.

Currently, the changing of an era (改元 *kaigen*) only occurs with the ascension of a new emperor, but previously, the changing of an era might occur for a variety of other reasons including an auspicious/inauspicious astronomical event, a response to natural disaster or ongoing epidemic, or a major government reformation.

All years recorded on *koseki* documents will be indicated as the era name and the respective year of that era. The most common era names that will be encountered in *koseki* documents will be 明治 (*Meiji*) and 大正 (*Taishō*) because most of the mass emigration occurred during these two eras.

In general, it will be quite unusual to see any era years earlier than 1825 on *koseki* documents. For completeness, era years from 1801 to the present are included below; era years prior to 1801 can be easily found on a variety of on-line resources.

Finally, it should be noted that calendar years with the changing of an era are considered to be both the last year of the old era and the first year of the new era. For example, the Emperor Hirohito passed away on January 7, 1989, so the first

week of 1989 was昭和64年 (64th year of Shōwa), while the rest of year was平成元年 (1st year of Heisei). Likewise, the Emperor Akihito abdicated the throne due to age and poor health on May 1, 2019, so the first four months of 2019 were平成31年 (31st year of Heisei) and the last eight months of the year were 令和元年 (1st year of Reiwa).

The era years from 1801 to the present are shown below:

- 享和 (*Kyōwa*) 1-4 (1801-1804)
- 文化 (*Bunka*) 1-15 (1804-1818)
- 文政 (*Bunsei*) 1-13 (1818-1830)
- 天保 (*Tenpō*) 1-15 (1830-1844)
- 弘化 (*Kōka*) 1-5 (1844-1848)
- 嘉永 (*Kaei*) 1-7 (1848-1854)
- 安政 (*Ansei*) 1-7 (1854-1860)
- 万延 (*Manen*) 1-2 (1860-1861)
- 文久 (*Bunkyū*) 1-4 (1861-1864)
- 元治 (*Genji*) 1-2 (1864-1865)
- 慶応 (*Keiō*) 1-4 (1865-1868)
- 明治 (*Meiji*) 1-45 (1868-1912)
- 大正 (*Taishō*) 1-15 (1912-1926)
- 昭和 (*Shōwa*) 1-64 (1926-1989)
- 平成 (*Heisei*) 1-31 (1989-2019)
- 令和 (*Reiwa*) 1- (2019-)

f. Other Vocabulary

Below are some miscellaneous vocabulary that you might also encounter as you research *koseki* documents.

- 出生 (*shusse*) – birth
- 婚姻 (*konin*) – marriage
- 死亡 (*shibō*) – death
- 離婚 (*rikon*) – divorce
- 離縁 (*rien*) – divorce
- 養子縁組 (*yōshiengumi*) - adoption
- 隠居 (*inkyō*) – retirement (as head of household)
- 亡 (*bō*) – deceased
- 入籍 (*nyūseki*) – entry into *koseki*
- 除籍 (*joseki*) – removal from *koseki*
- 分籍 (*bunseki*) – split into new *koseki*
- 本家 (*honke*) – main line
- 分家 (*bunke*) – branch line
- 届出 (*todokede*) – notification
- 相続 (*sōzoku*) – succession
- 解消 (*kaishō*) – annulment
- 養嗣子 (*yōshishi*) – adopted heir